Breaking the mould? Whiteness, masculinity, Welshness, working-classness and rugby league in Wales

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Introduction

Traditionally, rugby in Wales has meant rugby union, the once-amateur, fifteen-a-side code that has a long history of working-class, male involvement in the Valleys of South Wales (Williams, G., 1985). In recent years, however, rugby union has been joined in South Wales by the non-traditionally Welsh sport of rugby league. Once upon a time, rugby league was the sport that "bought" Welsh rugby players who went north (Collins, 2006). Rugby league has now expanded into Wales, developing its version of the rugby code. After a series of (historical) false starts, Welsh rugby league emerged in the 1990s as a sustainable participation sport. Two professional rugby league clubs have been established in Wales (Crusaders in Wrexham and the South Wales Scorpions), and a number of amateur rugby league clubs are now playing in the summer-based Rugby League Conference.

But why would anyone in Wales watch, and actively support, rugby league? What does it say about contemporary leisure choices, social identity and nationalism? In this paper, we explore the ways in which rugby league has penetrated the rugby union heartlands of Wales, and how the individuals who support Welsh rugby league (the players, the fans, the administrators) see their own Welshness in relation to their support of the 'other' rugby. We have interviewed Welsh rugby league enthusiasts at two periods in Welsh rugby league's recent history: the high point of the Crusaders move to North Wales in the Super League, and the low point of the club's resignation from the elite league and its resurrection in the lowest division of professional rugby league. For many rugby league fans the desire on the part of Welsh people to develop rugby league in Wales – supported by the Rugby Football League, the national governing body of rugby league in England, which works closely with the Wales Rugby League – is dismissed as an expensive nonsense by northern English fans on on-line forums and in the letters pages of rugby league newspapers. Yet those letters pages also show evidence of Welsh pride in their rugby league clubs, and Welsh pride in being part of rugby league's 'imaginary community' (Spracklen, Timmins and Long, 2010):

> I read with incredulity the letter by Phil Taylor in last week's League Express. Mister Taylor stated that 'the most important criterion for a Super league licence should be the proximity of the M62' [to the club]… Perhaps Mister Taylor should venture a little further from his 'shoe box in the middle of the M62'. I live in rural Carmarthenshire… A few friends and I decided to follow the Celtic Crusaders, which involved a 100 mile round trip for home matches down another motorway, the M4."

(Nic Day, letter to League Express, 2765, 27 June 2011, p. 35)

The following section is a literature review on Welshness, community, masculinity and rugby union. After that, we briefly discuss our methods and then introduce some important history and policy context around rugby league in the north of England and Wales. The rest of the chapter is built around the issues raised by our respondents and our critical analysis and discussion. We will show that the adoption of rugby league is associated with two separate trends: an awareness of and identification with its northern, working-class roots, its anti-London rhetoric and its ideology of toughness and resistance; and a rationalisation that league is just another form of rugby, in which traditional Welsh maleness can be protected. Both of these trends allow the whiteness of Welsh rugby union and of Welshness itself (like the whiteness of northern English rugby league and traditional northern identity – see Spracklen, Long and Timmins, 2010) to go un-noticed and unchallenged.

Welshness, Community, Masculinity and Identity – and Rugby Union

Gwyn A. Williams (1985) has demonstrated the invented and imagined nature of Welsh identity. Wales historically was defined by its bigger neighbour England (Wales is Old English for the land of the foreigners). Welsh nationalism emerged in the modern era built on a historiography conflating Arthurian tales of British kings fighting the evil Saxons, the resistance campaigns of medieval princes and Owain Glyndwr, non-conformity and the chapel, and half-remembered and reconstructed poems in the Welsh language. In most of the twentieth century, the modern Welsh Nationalists drew their support from Welsh-speaking communities in the rural north-west of Wales. The industrial area of South Wales was politically and culturally aligned to the Labour Movement and the class politics of the British Empire. More recently, and especially following devolution, Welsh nationalism has become part of the public discourse of South Wales. The post-industrial nature of South Wales could be seen to be ushering in a Welshness of communicative choice, where people choose to be Welsh through symbols, language and sport (Holden, 2011).

In the work of Haesley (2005), Welsh civic identity is associated with rugby union, which has a long history of participation, spectatorship and fanaticism – especially in the white, working-class, (post)industrial male world of the Valleys (Williams, 1985). This history shows a clear link between Welshness, working-class

white masculinity and rugby union, a link that has survived the decline of the mining industry (Jones, 1992). Johnes (2000, 2008) argues that rugby union in the twentieth century became an expression of the Welsh character: mental toughness, determination and "pride", all expressions of a certain type of Welsh masculinity (Williams, G.A., 1985). This is, in our view, a construction of what Anderson (1983) calls an imagined community: a community created and (re)constructed through the appeal to a shared history, a set of invented traditions and myths that make belonging exclusive to those who subscribe to the community's symbolism. We can see the imagined in the way in which the Welsh language acted as an exclusive symbolic boundary for northern Welsh nationalism in the twentieth century (Williams, G.A., 1985): to be Welsh one had to be a native Welsh speaker, thus the English-speakers of South Wales were deemed to be not Welsh *enough* to be true, authentic Welsh. But other types of imagined community exist in Wales and in modern Welsh nationalism: rugby union became the preserve of Welshness and Welsh masculinity among the English-speaking, working-class inhabitants of South Wales. The symbolic reality afforded by this imagined community transformed, following the collapse of the heavy industries of the Valleys, into an imaginary community associated with the game of rugby union. The game of rugby union became one of the few ways in which working-class, white Welsh men could find identity, belonging, place, physicality and authenticity. This relationship continues into the contemporary Wales of post-devolution politics, middle-class Welsh-speakers in Cardiff, and postmodernity. Harris (2006, 2007, and 2010) explores the construction of an imagined community of Welshness through rugby union that has survived into the commodified (post)modern world of professional rugby, media celebrities and "Cool Cymru". Despite the appearance of elite sports stars as celebrities and the globalization of elite sport, Welsh rugby union remains bounded by romanticised notions of the Valleys, nostalgic memories of male bonding in pits and chapel choirs, and a grim determination to beat the English in the Six Nations championship.

The relationship between masculinity and full-contact team sports is well-rehearsed in the sociology of sport. Gruneau and Whitson (1993) explore the ways in which ice-hockey is a sport in which Canadian boys learn how to be tough, Canadian men: boys learn to take knocks to fight tough, to respect coaches, to win at all costs, and to not be 'soft'. Grunean and Whitson (1993) argue that ice-hockey constructs Canadianness

and a particularly Canadian, working-class, white masculinity – there is a clear analogy with Welsh rugby, Welshness and Welsh masculinity. The form of masculinity constructed is hegemonic, that which exists at the top of what Connell (1995) calls the gender order, the historical distribution of power between men and women. In the gender order, physical sports help construct hegemonic, heterosexual masculinity (Messner, 1992). Such social construction can be seen working in rugby. Donnelly and Young (1985) describe the bonding rituals of male, American rugby players as being central to the creation of 'correct' masculinity, rituals that have the performative character of what Butler (2006) calls heteronormativity. Pringle and Markula (2005)'s research on male, New Zealand rugby players also shows the importance of physicality and embodiment in the construction of 'Polynesian' masculinities.

Methods

We have used qualitative research methodologies to examine the ways in which Welsh rugby league activists define their Welshness through their relationship with both codes of rugby. A content analysis of magazines and comments on internet sites was undertaken to develop an interview schedule of emerging themes (the content analysis is not used in this particular paper as the themes are evidenced in the interview data). This interview schedule formed the basis of on-line interviews with thirteen Welsh rugby league activists (eleven male, two female) – Welsh-based individuals who have chosen to support, play or develop rugby league in Wales. We selected these enthusiasts through our knowledge of key people involved in rugby league in Wales, both in the north and south of the country, and across players, supporters, volunteers, administrators and paid development workers. We tried to get a range of backgrounds and managed to interview men and women, South Walians and North Walians, English-born and Welsh-born people, and English and Welsh native speakers. This, of course, does not make a representative sample. However, we are satisfied that we have interviewed a significant enough proportion of key individuals across the Welsh rugby league scene, to allow some comparison and some generalisation of their responses concerning the future of rugby league in Wales. The first phase of interviews was undertaken when the Crusaders club was 'secure' in Super League (the first half of 2011). The structured interview schedule was followed up by additional unstructured on-line interviews with the same respondents in the

period following the demise of the Crusaders as a Super League club and the uncertainty of the club's future (late 2011, after which the club was reformed in the semi-professional Championship One division).

Rugby League Expansion: History and Policy Context

Rugby league emerged from a split away from the English Rugby Football Union in 1895. The biggest rugby clubs in the north of England established their own Northern Football Union that allowed players to earn money as players. Soon after the split, the Northern Football Union changed the rules of its sport, abolishing line-outs, modifying rucks and mauls (replacing them with the play-the-ball process) and reducing the number of players on each side to thirteen. There is a long history of the Rugby Football League attempting to set-up professional clubs in Wales and London (Collins, 2006). For a moment in the early twentieth century the northern version of rugby looked to be expanding into Wales with the appearance of a Welsh league, however the expansion, similar to other moves to spread the game to London in the first half of the last century ultimately failed. The Northern Union version of rugby spread quickly to other countries, including France, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, and Australia. In Australia this version of rugby became the dominant form of football in New South Wales and Queensland. The name of the code, rugby league, was an Australian neologism that was soon adopted by the Northern Football Union to distance itself from rugby union (Collins, 2006). Rugby league in the UK is traditionally a 'northern' English sport - but rugby league has expanded at amateur and professional level through the United Kingdom since the 1990s (Spracklen, 2005, 2007). Rugby league has also expanded into dozens of new countries in the northern hemisphere – and Wales has received support and funding through the Rugby League International Federation and the Rugby League European Federation, which has been pro-active in winning European Union funding for governance initiatives.

The emergence of the Super League plan in 1995 and its launch in 1996 fixed in place a policy commitment to the establishment and maintenance of professional rugby league outside of the northern English heartlands. The initial plans for the News Corp sponsored competition envisaged a reduction in the number of elite rugby league clubs in the North of England and the creation of new franchises: Paris was included in the final version of the Super League but South Wales was one of the places often

mentioned by journalists, expansionists and others who started to imagine how the Super League could become a true European Super League (Spracklen, 1996). A semi-professional club, South Wales, was quickly established as a potential precursor for a Super League franchise, though the club struggled to meet its obligations and folded after one season. Despite this failure, Wales was always a target for the Super League and for the development activity of the Rugby Football League. Amateur rugby league in Wales which, based on a handful of University teams and a couple of local clubs established by enthusiasts, was saved by the development of summer rugby league. At amateur level, a summer-based conference launched in the late 1990s saw the expansion of the game at a participatory, grassroots level across most of the UK, with well-established teams in Wales. The summer-based conference model allowed rugby union players and clubs to play rugby league, thus enabling rugby league's growth in south Wales to benefit from this connection to the existing player-base of rugby union. Amateur rugby league is not just played in south Wales – there are also teams in north-east Wales. There is a Wales Rugby League (the national governing body), supported by the Rugby Football League, with junior development pathways and junior teams, as well as full-time development officers. Finally, there are two semi-professional rugby league clubs, both in Championship One – South Wales Scorpions based at Neath, which were created to fill the gap when the Crusaders moved to Wrexham; and the North Wales Crusaders themselves, the reconstituted version of the Super League club, still based in Wrexham.

Responses, Discussion and Analysis

All of our respondents knew about rugby union. Most of them had strong connections to rugby union in their past through family, school or their peers, and all thought rugby union to be typically Welsh, typically masculine and being representative of a particular working-class, southern Welsh masculinity. Most of the respondents were born in Wales and brought up to watch or play rugby union, or a combination of both depending on their circumstances. A minority of the respondents were English-born now living in Wales: three of these came from a traditional northern English rugby league community but one came from the south of England and had no rugby league interest before moving to Wales. For the Welsh men growing up in South Wales, rugby union was seen as part of their inheritance from their fathers. As Respondent A, an ex-player involved in coaching rugby league explained: "I first went to [the local

union club] with my dad, he took me down there to watch them play, I must have asked him but I don't remember". His experience mirrored that of Respondent B, a supporter of one of the Welsh professional rugby league clubs, who said: "It was simple, really, my dad played so we followed him, when he stopped we were playing".

As well as the generational link with fathers, the Welsh-born respondents identified the importance of schools in inculcating the habit of playing ruby union. For some of the respondents, school rugby union was an enjoyable experience that allowed them to develop an appreciation of the sport and a place within the imagined, imaginary community of Welsh rugby union (whether as a player at open-age level, or as a supporter). But the love of and identification with rugby union was not common to all those who played schools rugby union. Respondent C, a Welsh rugby league fan and worker living in South Wales, described how he came to prefer league over union:

> I first started playing rugby union at school aged 6 years old and I played that for 10 years. I have never played league. I watched rugby on TV from an early age but it was never my sport. I started watching league when I was about 16 years old and instantly took to it. Through Jonathan Davies moving to league and I thought I'd give it a go watching Widnes v Canberra on TV…

For him, the enforced rugby union at school had no impact. It was not his sport because he did not identify with the sport's physicality and romanticized Welsh masculinity: "rugby [union] was just this rough thing played by big lads from up the valleys". Like many other young people, the brutal experience of school sport and Physical Education – where teachers cheer on the biggest and fastest and leave the others to stand on the sidelines – left a lasting and negative experience. The dominance of union on television and at school did not move him to express any interest in it. League, however, caught his attention. This was a new sport to him, but one that had touches of familiarity – like the rugby union he dismissed, only a faster, more appealing version, with none of the negative associations with his own Welsh environment. He could see a Welsh player – Jonathan Davies – making an impression on rugby league, and the spectacle – and enthusiasm for league – remained with him. Rugby league gave Respondent C a game in which he could find working-class solidarity, a place where he could express his contempt of union and his the Welsh Valleys' traditional masculinity associated with union: the symbols of traditional

Welshness. His disinterest in Welsh rugby union did not make him less of a Welsh patriot. He was aware of the history of English dominance over Wales, the

> wars from ages gone by, the drowning of a village, language acts etc. Wales has tried to… has been oppressed by England for years, like rugby league and [its oppression] by union respectively and like League, we'll keep fighting back. There are lots of different Welsh cultures now. I think that [old Welsh masculinity] has died out. Older stereotypes are sheep, rugby and coal mines, with probably the sheep remaining!

Like C, all of the other respondents from a non-rugby league background had some awareness of the existence of rugby league. Their involvement was triggered either through seeing a game on television or directly through a peer network (university or sports development activity or their union club running a league side, or a new league club appearing in the same locality). Respondent D, a senior coach in rugby league in Wales, had the traditional induction into rugby union, and continued playing it through university. However, when the "Welsh [rugby league] conference was set up back in 2003… at this time I was bored of playing in the rain and cold of the winter [rugby union season], I joined what was then my local club the [name of team] but broke my leg in my first game, so missed the rest of the season". The opportunity of playing or watching league was seen as an extension to the rugby union season, or an alternative to it in the case of Respondent D's comment about winter, but in neither case was rugby league seen as a rival to union. Rugby league was identified by some as being a game "better suited" to the Welsh than union (what a couple of respondents referred to as a suitability due to an essentialised Welsh "battler" mentality – see Williams, G.A., 1985), but others were happy to support both codes as different but similar forms of something they called "rugby". What was interesting about the Welsh-born "rugby" supporter was the absence of any antipathy towards league, even when we asked them if such antipathy had existed before they started to become involved in league. Each respondent insisted that any suspicion or hatred of rugby league had gone with the advent of the free gangway and professionalism in rugby union (Spracklen, 1996). The days of Welsh stars like Jonathan Davies going north have gone, and the rugby union in which our respondents grew up did not see league as a threat. Indeed the dangers to the sustainability of Welsh rugby union, in any case, come from the predations of French rugby union clubs and the dominance of Premier League football in Welsh popular culture (Harris, 2010). Our respondents expressed

ease and happiness that they could move from watching a union match to watching a league match, recognising familiar faces in the crowds at both events and facing no discrimination for following both codes as an expression of their Welsh rugby identity. Respondent E, an officer of one of the professional rugby league clubs, pointed out that:

> Many of our fan-base are involved with their local union clubs and can appreciate both "dual-coders", they are the ones who enjoy our game for what it is and don't care for the historic prejudice the game has had here in the past.

This attitude was prevalent among the Welsh-born respondents, with the exception of C. Among the respondents born in northern English rugby league localities, and raised on rugby league, such a blurring of league and union appeared problematic. One respondent suggested that it was necessary for rugby league in Wales to identify with union and use union's networks of players and clubs to develop rugby league. In practice, this is what has enabled rugby league to expand in many places around the world, from the south of England to Canada. It is therefore no surprise to see league enthusiasts allowing the blurring of boundaries and the dissolution of the 'Iron Curtain' that once existed between these two rugby codes (Collins, 2006). There was still suspicion, however among all of these respondents about the nature of union's supporter-base, its dominance in the Welsh sports press compared to league, and the uneasy relationship between the "nice people" who lived locally and the (supposedly) ruthless political machines of the IRB and Twickenham.

Respondent F, an English-born supporter of rugby league, who was not born or brought up in a rugby league area, had an interesting perspective on Welshness, union and league. As someone who had never really noticed league until he moved to Wales and started following rugby, he recognised the commonalities and the tensions between both codes. He also noted how respectable working-class Welshness in its southern and northern (English-speaking and Welsh-speaking) forms was closely associated with rugby union:

> Rugby union in Wales is played by a wide range of social classes with a bias towards the Valleys' working class and Welsh speaking rural masses. One thing I remember being told at university and which has struck me as true ever since is that the working class of the Valleys love playing rugby union as an opportunity to beat up: a, people from other valleys; b, the Cardiff snobs; and

> c, the English. My experience also tells me that the rougher end of the [working-class] market in places like Cardiff, Swansea, Barry and Merthyr Tydfil prefer football. I mainly watch rugby in Cardiff pubs and the international crowds are sociable and friendly. I mainly watch in a Welsh speaking pub and having been "identified" as English the banter is always intense but very friendly. League fans tend to be conscious of their 'outsider' status and are amazingly friendly to anyone who identifies themselves as leaguies. They can also drink any other group in human history under the table! As an outsider who has lived here for over ten years I would say it [Welshness] is many things. A version of Britishness with a particular industrial heritage at one end and a rural Welsh speaking community at the other.

For F, rugby union presents a complex, living culture of working-class respectability and Welsh, working-class pride. Union is masculine because it is an excuse to 'beat up' local rivals, posh people and the English in the Six Nations. Watching rugby union with Welsh speakers in Cardiff gave F a way in to becoming Welsh, truly authentically Welsh, though he feels he remains an outsider. He indicates that league is suited to the Welsh because they too are outsiders – in the wider unequal political and cultural relationship with England and the United Kingdom, and in the tension between preservation of a supposed ancient Welshness in the face of (post)modernity and globalisation. Of course, his thoughts betray contradictions about Welshness and about rugby union. He also provides something of a paradoxical account of whether union is played by all social classes in Wales – at once, it seems to be imagined as both the national game and one that is restricted to the better sort of working class (and, presumably, those posh people in Cardiff). It is clear that this respondent is uncertain about what constitutes Wales: is Wales, or at least its southern industrial heartland, a part of Great Britain? As Gwyn A. Williams (1985) argues, there is a difference between the south, built on the industry of the British Empire, and the Welsh-speaking north, where modern Welsh nationalism was created on the back of myths about purity and race. If these versions of Wales are different, then the Welsh-speaking pub where he watches rugby could not exist. Clearly, then, F's experience of Wales and Welshness suggests a blurring of those distinctive national identities. All the other respondents, like F, identified rugby union as representing a particularly banal type of Welshness: something merely anti-English at the time of the Five Nations, and something identified with Welsh 'battler' masculinity. Welshness itself was identified as being problematic by all those who tried to answer our question – there was no difference between the native Welsh speaker and the English speakers,

or those born in Wales and those born in England, or between the men and the women. All of them saw Welshness as essentialised in the history of rugby union, the masculinity of the players and the pride in the national team, and all of them suggested the history of Wales demonstrated the ambivalence of the relationship with England: the importance of Welsh industries and soldiers to Great Britain, the long shared history in popular culture, but the lack of concern by the English for the needs of Wales.

The saga of the Celtic Crusaders/Crusaders/North Wales Crusaders exemplified the concern that people in England - people in authority at places like the Rugby Football League and the Government, but also ordinary northern English rugby league fans - did not care for Wales. Celtic Crusaders' move to Wrexham caught southern Welsh rugby league fans by surprise. Some of our respondents were concerned that the club had been moved without any proper consultation, from the heartlands of Welsh rugby union to a border town closer to Widnes than Cardiff. The creation of South Wales Scorpions seemed to fill the gap caused by the sale of the Crusaders to Wrexham FC, but some of our respondents were concerned that the rush by the Rugby Football League to address the financial problems of the Celtic Crusaders' previous owners had led them to ignore potential issues with Wrexham FC. On the whole, though, most of the Welsh rugby league enthusiasts we interviewed had become reconciled to the move of the Crusaders to Wrexham – and the successful start to the 2011 season left many of our respondents positively optimistic about the rise of Welsh rugby league. With the National side given regular tests against other nations in the structured European competitions, alongside the Crusaders in Super League and Scorpions in the Championship - and the existence of the Valley Cougars in the top division of the national summer conference – all seemed well when we first interviewed our respondents.

However, in the second half of 2011 the Welsh Super League club withdrew from the competition to win a licence to play in Super League and announced it was withdrawing from the Super League at the end of the season. It transpired that the financial viability of the Wrexham deal was suspect because the problems with the previous owner's debts had not been dealt with in the process of the transfer. Many Welsh rugby league fans and some of our respondents blamed the failure to keep the

Crusaders going in the Super League on the officials of the England-based Rugby Football League. Part of this failure was also attributed to the enormous pressure put on the Crusaders and Welsh rugby league by English rugby league fans and journalists complaining about "preferential" treatment. Respondent G, a senior club official, for instance, complained that rugby league in England "suffers like Welsh rugby [union] from colloquialism and entrenchment". As Respondent H complained:

> I'm just tired of all this message board abuse against the club and Welsh RL from "certain Northerners" who think they are "in the know". They clearly all have their own self-interests and would prefer to see us fail as we are seen to be taking their place. You can't keep Rugby League in the North [of England] only forever, it either grows or it dies.

For a moment it looked as if rugby league in Wrexham would vanish altogether – only at the end of 2011 was a new club established, the North Wales Crusaders, backed by die-hard fans and sponsors of the old club and playing in Championship One alongside their fellow Welshmen the South Wales Scorpions. For all our respondents in the second phase of questioning, the loss of a Super League club has been a key point of concern. The Crusaders offered a pathway for elite performance, a profile on television and the wider media, and allowed Welsh rugby league to be seen as equally successful as Welsh rugby union and Welsh soccer. Without a Super League club, Respondent B acknowledges that "it'll be tough to make any sort of impact". The National team and the development - at semi-professional level and under - will continue, but there is no focus for fans, sponsors and would-be full-time professional players. In bemoaning the loss of the Crusaders, our respondents are acknowledging that the "healthiness" of any given modern sport is calculable on the number of tickets sold, the money raised on sponsorship deals and the salaries demanded by the elite athletes. This is partly a reaction to the cynicism of English rugby league fans; it is also, partly, a fact of the globalised sports media complex (Harris, 2010).

Conclusions

By comparing the Welsh rugby league community with rugby league communities in the north of England (Spracklen, Timmins and Long, 2010), the South of England (Spracklen, 2007) and France (Spracklen and Spracklen, 2008) we can see that each community has similar invented traditions and symbolic boundaries about working-

classness, whiteness and masculinity (Anderson, 1983). The imagined, imaginary communities are constructed around notions of resistance to southern England, and to the Establishment. The two rugbies are each given a historical mythology associated with proud, working-class men playing for their village or town – or cheering from the side-lines – men united by their skilled labour down the pit or in the factory. Like the Canadian boys of Gruneau and Whitson (1993), southern Welsh and northern English boys have found in rugby a sport that teaches them how to be men at a time when traditional industries have disappeared – for the Welsh boys, they become Welsh men through their rugby union; for the northern English boys, they become northern men through their rugby league (Spracklen and Spracklen, 2008; Spracklen, Timmins and Long, 2010). This masculinity is a hegemonic type associated by Connell (1995) with all full-contact team sports, though of course the working-class men of south Wales and northern England do not have hegemonic power in other parts of their lives: their working-class status provides the solace of invented traditions and symbolic boundaries of belonging, but real political and economic power has been lost (Bauman, 2000). This working-class masculinity is implicitly exclusive and built on a sense of history that assumes an unbroken tradition of generations of white men playing rugby in their locality. This whiteness in both rugbies is never discussed overtly by our respondents, but it is nonetheless built into the assumptions of community and heritage and place associated with the 'lost' working-class communities of 'old', traditional Wales and England (Spracklen, Timmins and Long, 2010). Both rugbies can accommodate black players as 'exotic' outsiders but the heartlands of Welsh rugby English rugby league – the post-industrial communities shaped by the collapse of organised labour and heavy industries – remain spaces filled with marginalised white people, or the memories of all-white communities. However, unique to Welsh rugby league are reinventions and accommodations to a hegemonic Welshness, which limits the communicative nature (Habermas, 1981:1984) of participating in Welsh rugby league.

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